

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 147.

Last time, Jiang Wei ... did NOT launch another Northern campaign. Yeah, I know. Crazy! Instead, he had been summoned back from the front lines by his emperor Liu Shan, thanks to some devious maneuvering by the wicked eunuch Huang Hao (4). Jiang Wei lost his cool and demanded that Liu Shan execute Huang Hao, but Liu Shan was like, "Yeah no, that's not happening. I love that guy!" So Jiang Wei stomped off in a huff.

But an official named Xi (4) Zheng (4) soon reminded Jiang Wei that you don't do something like that without expecting some blowback, and Jiang Wei asked Xi Zheng how he could save himself.

Xi Zheng said, "There is a place in the region of Longxi (3,1) called Dazhong (2,1). The soil there is quite fertile. You should follow the late prime minister's policy of having the soldiers till the soil and ask his highness for permission to go do that in Dazhong (2,1). First, the harvested grain can go to help feed the army. Second, you can try to occupy all the nearby districts. Third, the Wei will not dare to make any moves on Hanzhong. And fourth, as long as you retain command of the army out in the field, no one can move against you, and you will be able to avoid disaster. This is a plan to save yourself and the kingdom. You should do it at once."

"Sir, your advice is priceless!" a delighted Jiang Wei said in gratitude.

So the next day, Jiang Wei went to see Liu Shan and told him he wanted to go to Dazhong (2,1) and have the soldiers till the soil there. Liu Shan was like, yeah fine, go go go. The only thing you're killing around here is my buzz.

So Jiang Wei returned to Hanzhong and told his officers, "Our previous campaigns failed because we did not have enough provisions. So I'm going to take 80,000 men and go till the soil in Dazhong (2,1) and look for an opportunity to occupy the region. You all have toiled long and hard on the battlefield. Let's pull back for now and defend Hanzhong. The enemy has to transport their provisions over a great

distance across mountainous terrain. They will be fatigued, and they will fall back. Then we can give chase, and victory will be ours.”

Jiang Wei then assigned his top officers to defend various key locations and headed off to Dazhong with 80,000 men.

Word soon reached Jiang Wei’s nemesis Deng Ai. When Deng Ai heard that Jiang Wei was in Dazhong and that he had set up 40-some camps in an unbroken line in the shape of a snake, Deng Ai sent spies to go check out the situation and draw it all up on a map. He then sent word of this to the Wei capital. When Sima Zhao saw this report, he was enraged.

“Jiang Wei has encroached on the Heartlands time and again,” Sima Zhao said. “If we do not eliminate him, he will always be a concern.”

His adviser Jia (3) Chong (1) said, “Jiang Wei has learned Zhuge Liang’s teachings well. It’s hard to repel him quickly. We could send a smart and courageous officer to assassinate him. Then we won’t even have to trouble the army.”

But another adviser, Xun (2) Yi (3), disagreed. “You’re mistaken. Right now Liu Shan, the lord of Shu, is obsessed with wine and women and places his trust in Huang Hao. All the top officials are contemplating leaving him to dodge calamity. Jiang Wei is toiling the soil in Dazhong precisely for that reason. If we send a top general to invade Shu, we will win for sure. What need is there to use an assassin?”

Sima Zhao now laughed and said, “That is the best idea. I want to invade Shu. Who can be the commander?”

Xun (2) Yi (3) said, “Deng Ai is a top talent. If you assign Zhong (1) Hui (4) as his second-in-command, success will be ours.”

“My thoughts exactly!” Sima Zhao said with delight. He then summoned the officer Zhong Hui and told him, “I intend to appoint you as a commander to lead an invasion of Dongwu. What do you think?”

“My lord,” Zhong Hui replied, “your true intention is not to invade Wu, but to invade Shu.”

“You really know me well!” Sima Zhao said as he burst into laughter. “So how should we go about invading Shu?”

“I had expected that your lordship would want to do this,” Zhong Hui said. “So I have already prepared a map.”

When Sima Zhao unrolled the map. It noted all the places for pitching camp or storing grain, where they can advance, and where they can retreat.

“You are a true commander!” Sima Zhao said as he studied the map. “How about if you and Deng Ai join forces to invade Shu?”

To this, Zhong Hui replied, “The kingdom of Shu is vast and cannot be invaded by one route alone. Deng Ai and I can invade along separate routes.”

So Sima Zhao appointed Zhong Hui as the General Who Quells the West and gave him command of the troops inside the mountain passes that protected the Heartlands. At the same time, he sent an envoy to appoint Deng Ai the General who Conquers the West and commander of the troops beyond the passes. And the two of them were to arrange a date to do some quelling and conquering.

The next day, Sima Zhao went to court to discuss the invasion. But one official said, “Jiang Wei has repeatedly encroached on the Heartlands, and our troops have suffered many casualties. Right now, we might not even be able to defend ourselves, much less venture deep into treacherous mountains and bring disaster upon ourselves.”

But Sima Zhao was not putting up with that attitude. “I intend to wage war on a corrupt ruler in the name of honor. How dare you oppose me?!” he shot back angrily as he ordered the guards to take that

naysayer outside. Moments later, the naysayer's head was carried back in, and everyone present turned pale.

His point sufficiently made, Sima Zhao now continued, "Since I pacified the East, I have rested for six years. The troops and supplies are all ready. I have long wanted to invade Wu and Shu. So now, I am going to pacify Shu first, and then I will sail down the river and gobble up Wu as well. In my estimation, there are only about 90,000 enemy troops defending their capital, no more than 50,000 defending their borders, and no more than 70,000 tilling the soil with Jiang Wei. I have already ordered Deng Ai to lead the 100-some thousand troops outside the passes to keep Jiang Wei bottled up in Dazhong (2,1) and prevent him from going east. I will send Zhong Hui to lead 300,000 crack troops from inside the passes and attack Hanzhong in three directions. Liu Shan, the lord of Shu, is muddleheaded. When the border towns are sacked, the people in the capital will panic, and their kingdom will fall for sure."

Everyone at court agreed that was an awesome plan, because no one wanted to follow the dead guy's lead. Zhong Hui now began preparing for his campaign. To prevent word of his mission leaking out, he proceeded under the pretext of preparing for an invasion of Wu. He ordered the five provinces whose armies were now under his command to begin building warships, and sent men out to collect existing ships.

These moves puzzled Sima Zhao, so he asked Zhong Hui, "You are going to the Riverlands by land, so what need have you for ships?"

Zhong Hui replied, "When Shu hears that we are moving against them, they will no doubt ask Dongwu for help. So I am putting on the appearance of invading Wu to make sure Wu does not dare to make any rash moves. Within a year, Shu will have fallen, and our ships will be built. Then it would be easy to invade Wu."

Sima Zhao was impressed with that reasoning, and he chose a date for the army to move out. On the third day of the seventh month of the year 263, the Wei invasion force under Zhong Hui's command set out. Sima Zhao personally went several miles outside the capital to see them off.

As the army departed, an official named Shao (4) Ti (4) whispered to Sima Zhao, "My lord, you have given Zhong Hui command of 100,000 men to invade Shu. In my opinion, he is too ambitious and cannot be given such great power alone."

Smiling, Sima Zhao said, "You think I don't know that?"

"Since you know, then why don't you have someone share that authority with him?" Shao (4) Ti (4) asked.

"The officials at court do not think it's feasible yet to invade Shu because they are afraid," Sima Zhao said. "If I force them to fight, they will lose for sure. But Zhong Hui alone has suggested a plan to invade Shu. That shows he is not afraid. Only by being fearless can we conquer Shu. Once Shu falls, its people will lose heart. Defeated commanders make poor heroes, and officials of a fallen kingdom rarely plot to preserve it. So even if Zhong Hui harbors ulterior motives, the people of Shu will not help him. And as for the Wei forces, once they win, their minds will be set on going home, so they would not follow Zhong Hui into rebellion, so they are even less of a concern. But these words must stay between you and me. Don't let them leak out."

While Sima Zhao was whispering those secrets, in another part of the massive sendoff for Zhong Hui, two court officials were also talking amongst themselves. Now, Zhong Hui and his troops were looking mighty fine on this day, and just about everyone who had come out to see them off were impressed. But there was one official who simply smirked and said nothing. When one of his colleagues saw this, he asked, "Do you think Zhong Hui and Deng Ai will succeed in conquering Shu?"

"Conquering Shu? Yes," this official replied, "but come back to the capital? I fear not."

But when his colleague asked why, this guy just smiled and refused to say.

So now, let's catch up with Zhong Hui on his campaign. Once he pitched camp, he assembled all his officers and asked them, "We need a top general to serve as the vanguard, to cut roads through the mountains and build bridges across rivers. Who dares to take on this responsibility?"

An officer immediately volunteered, and his name was Xu (2) Yi (2). He had a distinguished pedigree. He was the son of Xu Chu, aka Mad Tiger, one of Cao Cao's most fearsome warriors. So everybody now figured, hey like father like son, right? So they all supported making Xu Yi (2) the vanguard.

Zhong Hui said to him, "You are a stout warrior. You and your father are famous, and everyone here has vouched for you. You may assume command of the vanguard and lead 5,000 cavalry and 1,000 infantry to take Hanzhong. Divide your troops into three forces. You will lead the middle force through Xie Valley. Your left flank will march out of Luo (4) Valley, and your right flank will travel through Ziwu (2,3) Valley. All these locations are on treacherous terrain. You must flatten the roads, build and repair bridges, and break through rocks so that they do not block our army. If you violate orders, you will be punished according to military law."

Xu Yi accepted his orders and headed off. Zhong Hui then followed with his army of more than 100,000 as they traveled night and day toward the Riverlands.

Meanwhile, along the western front, in the region of Longxi (3,1), Deng Ai was getting ready for his part of the invasion. He sent his fellow commander Sima Wang (4) to go keep the Qiang tribes busy, since those guys had been occasional allies of the Shu. He then called up forces stationed at various towns and cities in the region to assemble at his base.

That night, Deng Ai had a dream. He dreamt that he had scaled a tall mountain and was looking down on the region of Hanzhong when suddenly, a spring bubbled up from underfoot and started shooting water up into the air. He startled awake and found himself soaked through with sweat.

Deng Ai now summoned his bodyguard and told him about the dream. It so happened that this bodyguard was well-versed in omens and such, so he explained it this way: When you put the character for water over the character for mountain, you get the hexagram that means 'impeded.' That hexagram reads, 'Gain to the southwest, loss to the northeast.' And Confucius said, 'Go to the southwest to find glory; go to the northeast to find your end.' General, on this campaign, you will conquer Shu for sure, but you will be 'impeded' there and not return."

This prognostication left Deng Ai in an unhappy mood. But then a message arrived from Zhong Hui, asking him to rendezvous to join forces and invade Hanzhong. So Deng Ai ordered the imperial inspector of Yong (1) Province, Zhuge Xu (4), to lead 15,000 men to go cut off Jiang Wei's path of retreat. He then sent three other forces of 15,000 men each to attack Jiang Wei's location from the left, right, and rear. Deng Ai himself led 30,000 men to serve as backup.

Word of all these troop movements soon reached Jiang Wei, who was presently garrisoned in the area of Dazhong (2,1), hiding from the turmoil in the Shu court. But he could not ignore this news. He immediately wrote to the emperor Liu Shan, asking him to send the general Zhang Yi (4) to go defend Yang'an (2,1) Pass and the general Liao Hua to go guard Yinping (1,2) Bridge, the two most critical locations. He also asked Liu Shan to send an envoy to the kingdom of Wu to ask for help. Meanwhile, Jiang Wei himself was going to lead the troops he had with him to go meet the enemy.

This message arrived at the Shu court and found Liu Shan in the middle of -- what else -- partying with his favorite eunuch Huang (2) Hao (4). So Liu Shan asked Huang Hao, "The kingdom of Wei has sent Zhong Hui and Deng Ai at the head of large armies to invade us. What should we do?"

Huang Hao answered, "Jiang Wei just sent this message because he's yearning for an opportunity for glory. There is no need for your highness to be concerned. I have heard that there is a sorceress in the capital who serves a god that can reveal people's fortunes. We can ask her."

So, presented with practical advice on troop deployments on one hand and, umm, shall we say a less practical suggestion on the other, guess which one Liu Shan picked. Yeah, he went with the witch. So the sorceress was summoned and brought into the palace in a chariot and allowed to sit on the emperor's throne. Liu Shan offered up his sacrifices, and then the sorceress began dancing barefoot with her hair hanging down. After frantically prancing around the hall a few dozen times, she whirled around on the emperor's table.

"The god is descending," Huang Hao said. "Your highness, you must send away your attendants and speak to the god yourself."

So Liu Shan sent all the attendants away and then prostrated. The sorceress now shouted, "I am the local god of the Riverlands. Your highness is enjoying peace and happiness. Why do you even need to ask about anything else? In a few years, even the lands of Wei will belong to you. There is no need for concern."

When she finished speaking, the sorceress passed out and did not regain consciousness until a good while later. Liu Shan was delighted at what the ... umm ... god of the Riverlands had told him and rewarded the sorceress handsomely.

So, with that ironclad guarantee of good fortune in hand, Liu Shan had no need for Jiang Wei's advice. He ignored Jiang Wei's suggestions and continued to rock and roll every day and party every night. Jiang Wei sent one urgent letter after another, but Huang Hao did not allow any of them to reach Liu Shan.

While this debacle was happening, Zhong Hui was busy marching toward Hanzhong. His vanguard general Xu Yi (2) wanted to be the first to earn some glory on this campaign, so he marched his troops to Nanzheng (2,4) Pass. He told his officers, "Beyond this pass lies the region of Hanzhong. There are not many troops defending this pass, so we can take it by force."



His officers snapped to and began to lay siege to the pass. But just as they got close, they were greeted with a torrent of arrows, courtesy of an ambush that the commanding officer defending the pass had set up, using those deadly crossbows that Zhuge Liang had designed that fire 10 bolts at a time. Before Xu Yi could even fall back, he had already lost a few dozen riders.

Licking his wounds from this initial setback, Xu Yi reported the situation to Zhong Hui, and Zhong Hui personally led about 100 men to go check things out. As he approached the pass, he too was greeted with the customary shower of arrows. As Zhong Hui turned to fall back, the commanding Shu officer charged out of the pass with 500 troops to attack. While Zhong Hui was galloping across the bridge in front of the pass, the soil on the surface of the bridge gave way and his horse's hooves became stuck. Zhong Hui was nearly thrown out of the saddle as his horse tumbled to the ground. Zhong Hui now abandoned the horse and fled on foot. But just as he got off the bridge, the Shu officer arrived and prepared to stab him with a spear.

But just then, an arrow flew from the bow of one of Zhong Hui's officers, and the Shu commander immediately fell dead to the ground. Zhong Hui and his troops now turned and charged toward the pass. The 500 Shu soldiers who had charged out of the pass were caught between the enemy and their own defenses, and that was a problem, because the soldiers left inside the pass did not dare to fire their arrows because they didn't want to hit their own guys. Well, that was a mistake, because that was all the opening Zhong Hui and his men needed to storm in and take the pass.

After this initial victory, Zhong Hui promoted the officer who saved him and rewarded him with a saddle and a suit of armor. Then, he summoned his vanguard general Xu Yi and chewed him out.

"You are the vanguard. No obstacle should have stood in your way. It was your job to prepare roads and bridges for the army. Yet just now, when I was on the bridge, my horse's hooves were stuck. I almost fell off the bridge. If not for one of my officers, I would be dead right now! Since you have violated orders, you must be punished according to military law!"

And military law meant kissing your head goodbye. Zhong Hui ordered the guards to drag Xu Yi outside. His officers all pleaded with him, saying, “Xu Yi’s father Xu Chu rendered service to the court. We hope you can spare his life.”

But Zhong Hui replied angrily, “If I do not enforce the rules, how can I command the troops?”

And that was that. Xu Yi’s head was soon hanging on a pole, and everybody had been put on notice that this Zhong Hui was NOT messing around.

Next up on the road to Hanzhong were the towns of Lecheng (4,2) and Hancheng (4,2). The two officers defending those towns saw the massive Wei army and decided to just stay behind their walls. Zhong Hui decided he wasn’t going to waste time trying to lay siege to those towns, so he left some troops behind to surround them and keep those Shu forces at bay, while Zhong Hui himself marched on toward Yang’an (2,1) Pass, which, if you remember, was one of the two super-critical locations that Jiang Wei had told Liu Shan to send reinforcements to.

Of course, Liu Shan did no such thing, and Yang’an (2,1) Pass was presently being defended by the general Fu (4) Qian (1), with his fellow general Jiang (3) Shu (1) as his second-in-command. When the two of them huddled about how to proceed, Jiang Shu (1) said, “The enemy has vast numbers. The best course of action is to defend.”

“Not so,” Fu Qian said. “The enemy has traveled a great distance, so they must be tired. Their superior numbers are no reason for concern. If we do not go out to fight, then the towns of Lecheng (4,2) and Hancheng (4,2) are doomed.”

To this, Jiang Shu said nothing. Soon, word arrived that the Wei army was outside, and the two Shu generals went to the top of the walls to take a look. Pointing with his whip, Zhong Hui shouted, “I am here with 100,000 men. Surrender now, and you will both receive a position befitting your rank. But if you remain obstinate, then when I sack the pass, the good and the bad will be destroyed!”

Enraged by those words, Fu Qian told Jiang Shu (1) to keep an eye on the pass while he himself led 3,000 men to go out and take on Zhong Hui. As soon as they charged out, Zhong Hui turned and retreated with his army. Fu Qian gave chase. But soon, he saw the enemy regrouping, so he decided to head back to the pass.

But when he turned around, he was stunned to see the enemy's banners flying atop the walls of the pass. From atop the walls, his second-in-command Jiang Shu (1) shouted, "I have already surrendered to Wei!"

Fu Qian was fuming at this betrayal. He shouted back, "You ungrateful, treacherous traitor! How can you face the world?!"

Fu Qian then turned back toward the enemy troops and galloped into their midst to take them on. The Wei army soon enveloped him. Fu Qian charged to and fro, but could not break out. Meanwhile, most of the 3,000 men he had with him had been killed or injured.

Looking skyward, Fu Qian sighed and declared, "In life I was a servant of Shu, and so shall I die!"

He now resumed fighting, but before long, he had suffered numerous stab wounds, and his blood stained his armor. Then, his horse collapsed. With no way out, Fu Qian slit his own throat. A later poet remembered him thus:

That final day he vented righteous rage,

And we forevermore hold high his name.

One would rather die like Fu Qian

Than to live on like Jiang Shu.

Well, poems about hopeless last stands are nice, but you know what's even nicer? Sacking an enemy stronghold. Which was what Zhong Hui had just done. He now controlled Yang'an Pass and its vast storage of grain and weapons. He was delighted by this victory and rewarded the troops.

That night, while Zhong Hui and his men were resting inside their newly won prize, they suddenly heard loud cries coming from the southwest. Zhong Hui rushed outside his tent to see what's going on, but found no movement whatsoever. But his troops did not dare to sleep all night. And then, the next night, around midnight, the same thing happened again.

Spooked, Zhong Hui now sent some scouts out at dawn, and they reported back that they did not see a single soul for miles. Getting suspicious, Zhong Hui now personally led an entourage of a few hundred riders and went scouting toward the southwest.

They came upon a mountain and saw signs of death everywhere as ominous clouds gathered around the peak. Zhong Hui reined in his horse and asked the guide what mountain this was.

"This is Dingjun (4,1) Mountain," the guide replied, "It's where the general Xiahou Yuan was killed."

So in case you forgot, Xiahou Yuan was one of Cao Cao's kinsmen and top generals, but he was killed by the old Shu general Huang Zhong in their showdown here decades ago. Zhong Hui did not care for this ominous history and began to ride back. As soon as he went around a hill, however, a violent gale kicked up, and what seemed like a calvary of thousands suddenly appeared with the wind and charged him. Zhong Hui panicked and fled with his men. Countless riders fell off their horses along the way. And yet, when they got back to Yang'an Pass, they had not lost a single man. They just had a bunch of guys with some cuts and bruises or lost helmets.

Well that was ... strange. Everybody was now like, yeah, you know, maybe that was just a tornado or something.

Zhong Hui now asked the defector Jiang Shu (1), "Does Dingjun Mountain have a temple?"

“There are no temples here,” Jiang Shu said, “just the grave of prime minister Zhuge Liang.”

Wait?! What?! Oh no.

To see if Zhong Hui gets any more trouble from ghost Zhuge Liang, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!